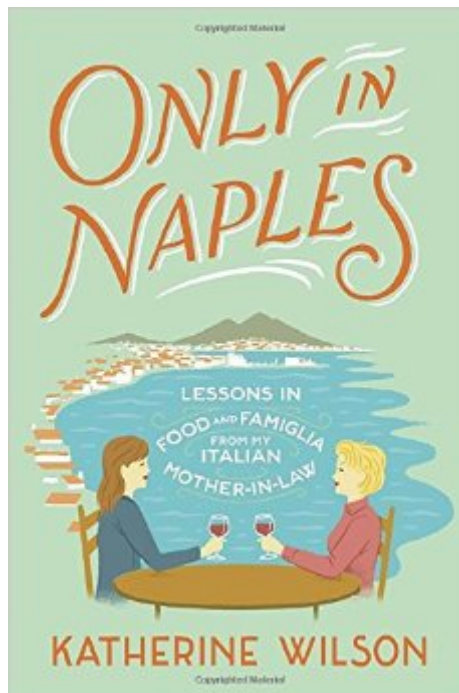


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Only In Naples: Lessons In Food And Famiglia From My Italian Mother-in-Law



Synopsis

Full of lighthearted humor, sumptuous food, the wisdom of an Italian mother-in-law, and all the atmosphere of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels, this warm and witty memoir follows American-born Katherine Wilson on her adventures abroad. Thanks to a surprising romance and a spirited woman who teaches her to laugh, to seize joy, and to love—a three-month rite of passage in Naples turns into a permanent embrace of this boisterous city on the Mediterranean. When I saw the sea at Gaeta, I knew that Naples was near and I was coming home. "There is a chaotic, vibrant energy about Naples that forces you to let go and give in," writes Katherine, who arrives in the city to intern at the United States Consulate. One evening, she meets handsome, studious Salvatore and finds herself immediately enveloped by his elegant mother, Raffaella, and the rest of the Avallone family. From that moment, Katherine's education begins: Never eat the crust of a pizza first, always stand up and fight for yourself and your loved ones, and consider mealtimes sacred—food must be prepared fresh and consumed in compagnia. Immersed in Neapolitan culture, traditions, and cuisine, slowly and unexpectedly falling for Salvatore, and longing for Raffaella's company and guidance, Katherine discovers how to prepare meals that sing, from hearty, thick ragù to comforting rigatoni alla Genovese to pasta al forno, a casserole chock-full of bacon, béchamel, and no fewer than four kinds of cheeses. The secret to succulent, tender octopus? Beat it with a hammer. While Katherine is used to large American kitchens with islands and barstools, she understands the beauty of small, tight Italian ones, where it's easy to offer a taste from a wooden spoon. Through courtship, culture clashes, Sunday services, marriage, and motherhood (in Naples, a pregnancy craving must always be satisfied!), Katherine comes to appreciate carnale, the quintessentially Neapolitan sense of comfort and confidence in one's own skin. Raffaella and her famiglia are also experts at sdrammatizzare, knowing how to suck the tragedy from something and spit it out with a great big smile. Part travel tale, part love letter, Only in Naples is a sumptuous story that is a feast for the senses. Goethe said, "See Naples and die." But Katherine Wilson saw Naples and started to live. Praise for Only in Naples "In a world filled with food memoirs, this one stands out. Katherine Wilson gives us more than the fabulous food of Naples. She offers us a passport to an exotic country we would never be able to enter on our own." —Ruth Reichl, author of My Kitchen Year "Warmhearted . . . an exuberant account of love and great Italian food." —Kirkus Reviews (starred review) "Sweet and humorous." —Publishers Weekly "Wilson has written a glorious memoir celebrating the holy trinity of Italian life: love, food, and family. Her keen eye and sense of humor take you through the winding streets of Naples at a clip, on a ride you hope will never end." —Adriana Trigiani, author of

The Shoemaker's Wife "How lucky we are to get these hilarious and wise perceptions filtered through a sincerely loving eye." Julie Klam, author of Friendkeeping "This thoroughly enjoyable love letter to Naples is a tribute to the author's irrepressible mother-in-law." Luisa Weiss, author of My Berlin Kitchen and founder of The Wednesday Chef

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Customer Reviews

My paternal grandparents were from Southern Italy. The sign on the wall of the eating room of our family vacation house (much too informal to be called a dining room) read "You don't have to be crazy to vacation here - but it helps!" Well - you don't have to be Italian to love this book - but I bet it helps. Katherine Wilson was still in college when she took a job in Naples for her year abroad, a family tradition. She was taken under the wing of the Avallone family and particularly the materfamilias Raffaella. Once a young woman with an eating disorder, she learned to cook, to eat, to love - and to love eating. As a bonus, the Avallone family included a son Salvatore who became Katherine's husband. This is a rich ragù of a story and also a cultural treatise. Italians are different from Americans of course - but Southern Italians are oh so different from Northern Italians. Courtship is different in Italy. Parenting is very different. As fate would have it, Katherine was raised by liberal parents and came to Naples totally open to new experiences. There are so many delightful bits in this book, I really don't want to spoil them. But I will pick my favorite character to tell you about. He is Zio Toto, the one-handed uncle who lost his hand setting off fireworks on New Year's Eve and who specializes in catching octopus without rods, nets or underwater guns. Katherine's mother in law appears in the title. It's a pretty good guess that Raffaella is the biggest personality in

the family and that much of the action will take place in the kitchen. For Italians, food is so much more than sustenance.

Katherine Wilson followed in the family tradition and did a semester overseas while studying at Princeton. That semester in Naples turned into a year, and then more time in Bologna (with weekend trips to Naples) and finally, marriage to her beloved Neapolitan boyfriend, Salvatore, and a life in Rome. This book is the author's paean to the food and family she gained, and in particular, to her mother-in-law's recipes and philosophies. You'd think there was no relating to a trust fund baby (Wilson Sporting Goods) married to the son of a wealthy Italian family, but that's not the case here. As an American toting a few extra pounds and away from home for the first time, Katherine experiences the insecurities we all feel when faced with elegance and natural beauty. Her svelte mother-in-law, Raffaella Avallone, dresses expensively and applies her make-up meticulously. Yet the kitchen is her natural habitat, the place from which she dispenses her bottomless and all-encompassing stores of love. "Eccomi," she says to all who are in need. "Here I am." You will love looking over Katherine's shoulders as she shops for food in Naples, teaches English to eager students, dubs Italian movies, and navigates the tricky waters of male-female relationships and eventually, the paranoid parenting of Neapolitan babies. "As a general rule, air is not to touch exposed flesh unless one is at the beach in Sardinia and it is 101 degrees," she writes. "If it rains, children should stay at home, and adults should go out only if absolutely necessary." At the end of the book, if you dare, Ms. Wilson has included her mother-in-law's favorite recipes: Ragu, Insalata di Polipo (octopus salad), Sartu di Riso, and several more.

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